DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 960 CS 205 303

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TITLE Linguistically-Based Language Systems for the Inner City Student.
PUB DATE May 79
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English (12th, Ottawa, Canada, May 8-11, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Composition (Literary); Critical Thinking; *Grammar; Higher Education; *Inner City; Linguistics; Nontraditional Students; *Remedial Programs; *Sentence Structure; Teaching Techniques; Transformation Generative Grammar; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Sector Analysis

ABSTRACT

The traditional method of teaching writing to students in universities by correcting their errors supposes a generally well-developed sense of written language structure and formal English language discourse. The new population seeking higher education does not always possess such a background. An alternative instructional method is to use the systems of language structure to offer positive models. Sector analysis is one such scientific study of language that can be used to fuse the remedial needs of the inner-city student with college-level language awareness. Sector analysis, or X-Word Grammar, is a linguistic system developed by Robert L. Allen. Its particular strength is that it is a system for examining written English in relation to obligations or expectations that must be fulfilled in conventional English. In X-Word Grammar, the sentence is defined as a series of slots or positions. The basic positions of subject, used in reference, and predicate, used in predication, are defined in terms of an X-Word that moves to the front of a yes/no question. A knowledge of positions and constructions combined with reader anticipation establishes a groundwork for critical and logical development of thinking. (MKM)

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Linguistically-Based Language Systems for the Inner City Student

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Linguistically-Based Language Systems for the Inner City Writer

Remedial writing students compose a language pool that has not always been well represented in American colleges and universities. Higher education, perhaps for the first time in American history, is addressing a constituency which lacks formal language skills thought to be fundamental. Colloquial, dialectal, and non-native speakers, frequently older than previous generations of college students, have entered into the gates of learning and are clamoring for admission to the principalities once reserved for the pure of language. Colleges serving inner city applicant pools find minority populations ranging upwards to ninety and ninety-five per cent (Medgar Evers- CUNY) to seventy-five per cent (in central Chicago) and other enrollments are bound to follow behind. Conventional introductory college English courses were not designed for such populations, nor do they serve their needs -- new remedies, if not new remediations, are called for.

Traditional college English courses have been and continue to be oriented around a "great ideas of Western man" format, with considerable deference paid to critical interpretation of literature to aid in a humanizing process which the student is expected to undergo. Milton's Paradise Lost, as the great repository of the Western humanistic tradition, is the typical study of such courses in the New England colleges of my background. In simple terms, however, many inner city students have been humanized on the streets. Urban college populations are substantially older than previous generations of college students and have much life experience. However, they frequently lack the literary background which formed the basis of a homogeneous language population in the conventional college. If black, oral rather than written forms of speech characterize their language experience, with consid-

erable intrusions of ethnic language characteristics. If Spanish, second language interference may characterize their spoken and written English. If from ethnic groups not prevously represented in college populations, the formal language structure of Edited American English may show deviant inflectional endings and elongated sentence patterns. This is indeed a pandemonium, but as urban educators we hold of little value that virtue which shrinks untested from the dusty field of combat -- we all stand with Milton on that. A new fusion of language abilities and critical awareness is called for, and if we are not to find our students shunted into remedial centers -- penal colonies for the impure of language guarded by the Cerberus of the SAT test -- we must inquire into the nature of linguistically-based writing systems as a potential way of fusing language needs with college-level instruction.

Paradise lost is the teaching of writing to students in our universities by correcting their "errors." Such correction presupposes a generally well-developed sense of written language structure and formal English language discourse. The new population seeking higher education does not always possess such a background. This brings us to seek a new way to a paradise regained. Regaining paradise is done by developing a positive instruction using the systems of language structure to offer positive models. Actually, such a procedure is conservative: Ben Franklin himself claims to have learned his English by copying Addison and Steele. The linguistic systems now available offer us an equally good opportunity to teach language structure and relate that structure to the actual experience of the student. Sector Analysis is one such scientific study of language which I will deal with in this paper. It is offered not as the answer to our needs, but as an example of an answer which has proved successful and should encourage further experimentation and controlled investigation of results.

The purpose of the linguistically-based system of language instruction for the inner city student is twofold, involving a fusion of remedial needs with college-level language awareness.

First, the basic structures of the English language, which are no longer the common, seemingly intuitive background that they once were in higher education, may be taught. Second, the psychology of language form -- a college-level critical awareness of language -- may be taught. This multi-tiered program offers a way around the dilemma now confronting almost every language program which I know of, how to credit writing courses. Students who can use linguistics to critically evaluate literature need make no apology for learning at the same time to eliminate the comma splice. Such a program may take a student a year rather than a single semester to complete, but the end result would justify the expense in time. In other words, we might find that we no longer need to separate remedial writing from content instruction if we really know how to inquire into American English as structural as well as a rhetorical entity.

Our first problem is how to knowingly choose a system for approaching language. There are a variety of systems, of which the best known are transformational grammar and, increasingly in such areas as New York City, Sector Analysis. The need for a new grammar is derived largely from what I take to be a collapse of confidence in the School Grammar which most present English teachers were taught. The memorable feature of school grammar was its line diagrams -- the Reed and Kellogg sentence diagramming with subjects and verbs on a line and prepositional phrases and adverbs dangling in their various directions. School grammar is a prescriptive attempt to fix language patterns, based on arbitrarily selected models. It contains numerous anomolies which linguists are fond of pointing out, but its real weakness lies in the fact that it is simply no longer something which instructors are willing to focus on; the school grammar serves no purpose; it is an end in itself, and teachers rightly reject focussing on artificial structures for their own sake. Breaking a sentence down into its constituents is interesting, but it becomes vital to a student only when it shows him something about his own working language and its interactions.

Stratificational Linguistics should be mentioned in passing. At present there is no procedure for teaching this linguistic system to students at a lower level of college instruction. It is a highly specialized study of how languages encode and decode meanings in the various strata of language from phoneme to lexeme to sememe, based on a neurological model. In David Lockwood's words, "As the focus of descriptive linguistics has been on items in the data, and that of generative linguistics has been on rules reflecting generalizations pertaining to the data, that of cognitive linguistics (Stratificational Linguistics) must be on relationships representing the information in the speaker's brain."[1]

Representative of the patterns of language, Stratificationl Linguistics finds smaller units of language meaning joined in speech at nodes and projected to an audience where the message is similarly decoded and reencoded. These analytic characteristics promise an explanation of how language affects both producer and receiver and thus adds a dimension to structural language study. Most of its practical applications, however, have yet to be developed.

Transformational-Generative Grammar is a theoretical analysis of language structure which is intended to develop a constant body of rules by which English sentences are generated. In principle, sentences are described as being made up of kernels -- constituents such as noun phrases and verb phrases which in turn may consist of lower level constituents. Unlike the previous system makers, Chomsky's offspring have generated numerous school texts in this area, several of which appear to me to be very interesting. My only discomfort with this grammar is that it appears slightly more theoretical in its applications than I choose to be in the classroom and it does not fully correspond with my own sense of the psychology of form, but I have no academic argument to make against it; I am merely not one of its practitioners.

Sector Analysis is a linguistic system developed by Robert L. Allen, now at Columbia Teachers College in New York City. Originally used to teach English to Turkish twelve-year olds, it has been adapted over twenty years to the formal analysis of Edited

American English is a position and construction language in which certain sentence positions -- or slots -- are regularly filled by certain constructions -- or fillers. Its particular strength is that it is a system for examining written English in relation to obligations or expectations which must be fulfilled in conventional English. Thus, it can be used to show the difference between performance and requirement in an objective way, and it can also be used to indicate how reader responses may be manipulated by a writer. At the present time, Sector Analysis, or X-Word Grammar as it is also called when used in remedial writing programs, is used by various practitioners in a variety of situations. Language analysis, TESOL and TEFL, and remediation all come within its general applications.

The sentence is defined in X-Word Grammar as a series of slots or positions. The basic positions of subject -- used in reference -- and predicate -- used in predication -- are defined in terms of an X-word which moves to the front of a yes-no question, as indicated in the top frame on the first page in front of you.[2] The basic pattern shown here is the simple trunk of an Edited American English sentence in which there is a capital letter, a yes-no question with no words left over, and a punctuation mark. One of the most striking aspects of this system for me has always been the illimitable joy with which many inner city students apply this mechanical definition of sentence positions -- seeing the structure of grammar, very simply, for the first time in their lives. The concept of subject as reference is also useful, because it allows the inner city student to relinquish the sort of subjective guesswork which many grammars encourage in finding what a sentence is about. A first principle is that if the words between the X's do not identify a clear subject, then the reader has a problem in the making.

Kenneth Pike gives an example of a sentence as a train of box-cars.[3] This metaphor has some applicability. In front of the obligatory positions for subject and predicate in written

English, there is an optional position for a front adverbial; at the end of the trunk, there is an optional position for an adverbial. In fact, as the second sentence illustrates, several layers of positions and constructions can be uncovered which suggest the structural relationships in the Edited American English Sentence. Comparisons with other languages found in urban experience are possible: Spanish allows the subject sector to remain empty, unlike English, leading to a heavy occurence of topic-comment sentences, with doubled subjects, among Spanish speakers; Black English regularly omits the obligatory time indicator of EAE, frequently represented by the X-Word and so a prestige feature of English is missing. When one of the units is out of position, we begin to encounter the more-or-less racially ordered rejection of language-meaning based on reader response sometimes as much as on any inherent failure in the writer's thinking. The tagmemes -- the boxcars -- the combinations of position and construction in anticipated forms are crucial to create "understanding." This lesson is important in remediation, and it points toward the psychology of literary form as well.

One of the most obvious attractions of a system like Sector Analysis is that it offers simple and easily grasped principles of language which a student can check against the varieties of language within the urban context, and he can quickly be brought to realize the existence of many differing dialects. Positive models can be developed and checked mechanically by the student himself. Subject and predicate areas, defined in terms of the X-Word, can be viewed independently in the editing process and the student can assess what he is telling his reader and what his reader will understand him to be saying about his primary reference, and he can compare this material to his own spoken language and the language he encounters around him.

The second sentence which you see on the sheet in front of you shows a more complete analysis of a sentence.[4] This analysis, by the way (although without the layered format used here) is

achievable by remedial writing students in a single semester. I have attempted to add an overlay implying that some special intention -- "Force (F)" to John Searle -- may control the specific form of the sentence in its statement of Reference (R) and Predication (P).[5] The ∅ or sentence layer is the first layer which Dr. Allen would use in Sector Analysis, and it shows the obligatory capital, underlayer (yes/no question and optional sectors), and punctuation mark of the EAE sentence.[6] The underlayer has positions for an obligatory trunk and optional adverbials at the front and end, which are unfilled and marked by ∅ on the page. The trunk has an area of reference, the obligatory subject, and an area of predication, the obligatory predicate. Notice at this point that the units of the language are being broken down in chunks rather than word by word. Conventional grammars proceed by individual words, but Sector Analysis emphasizes the "chunking" process, a process which is well-adapted to the patterns of student speech for analytic purposes and is also well-adapted to the actual psychology of the perceiver. Within the major areas we find smaller chunks of language performing the functions of modification and so on, as in the clusters "my friend" and "the car". These clusters are well-adapted to teaching foreign-language students principles such as the obligatory use of determiners to identify certain nominals; in English we would not say "John is getting car." The identifies the nominal and marks a nominal construction, and the sentence is easily distinguished in form from "John is getting sick."

The chunking of subject and predicate deserves special attention because it can be used both in reading, writing, and criticism. In writing it helps a student identify his subject and assess its usefulness as a reference for the reader. For a reader, the ability to find the linguistic subject of a sentence can help him understand difficult material, even when he may not know the vocabulary -- an obvious and on-going problem for the inner city student. For example, you yourselves might now find the subject in the nonsense sentence "Retslach purslane has gabled the wretch"

by making a yes-no question and boxing the words between the X's: try it. Has is the X-Word; "retslach purslane" is the subject. The student who can carry out these functions has learned a basic linguistic principle of Edited American English -- a college-level concept. He is capable of independent analysis in the best scientifically objective fashion. There is no need to apologize for teaching remedial English when it contains such materials.

As the student learns to carry out these functions, he is learning to edit his own writing of course. He is also learning new sectors of the sentence. Even in cases where little progress seems to occur in remedial students -- simply because their language needs are so great and means of measurement so subjective and so crude, we find changes in structure. In relation to sector analysis, new areas of the sentence are used for the first time and new and more exact constructions are used to fill them. This is the area where our testing procedures subjectively lower grades of students who make a few more mistakes in a tremendously expanded writing sample; it is a built-in racist tendency in most grade-by-reading evaluation programs, even in sophisticated ones announced by the National Council of Teachers of English.[7]

As an aside, I might point out that writing behavioral competencies for such a program of instruction is simple. Subject identification involves the use of the two X's and the boxing of the subject. Predicate identification is similar, and so on down through the layers. The yes/no question game is the means to the competencies for subject and predicate, and the testing procedure is both verbal and on-going in the classroom and readily accomplished by asking students to turn statements into questions in writing. This last case also serves as a test for time orientation in verbs. Such easily measured and simplified competencies make this discipline the sort of thing which parents might take home to their children to explain what they are studying in college, or which para-professionals might use in day-care centers as games without even announcing the language teaching component involved.

The psychology of form is something which I have alluded to without fully explaining, but it is the dimension of language study which is most truly college level, and it is well suited to Sector Analysis as conceived by Dr. Allen. Kenneth Burke, in Counterstatement, proposes a critical methodology which is formalist, but is based on Aristotelian notions of tension, frustration and catharsis through the development of patterns.[9] Simply put, the methodology focusses on the response of the reader as the means to understanding how the form of a literary work such as Hamlet, or Paradise Lost, operates. Expectations are established through imagery, plot, and minor repetitive devices, tension is heightened and the reader fustrated by plot complications, evolving metaphors, and so on, and finally satisfaction is gained and literary meaning fulfilled through the resolution of the plot and the completion of the patterns of imagery and rhetorical form. Minor forms of syntax, simile, repetition, alliteration, and so on all contribute to the "effect" on the reader in transmitting the vision of the author.

Sector Analysis bears directly on this spectrum of analytic methods. The construction-position or slot-and-filler concept is basically a description of expectation and satisfaction. Formal departures have both good and bad measurable consequences. Repetition of form and substitution constitute literary style. e. e. Cummings' oeuvre is a most obvious case in such poems as "i thank you god for most this amazing day" where syntactical patterns are manipulated to expand meanings. Such analysis can easily be applied to Mark Twain, Baldwin, Melville, even Francis Trollope's The Domestic Manners of the Americans. The last frame on the page before you gives some idea of the thematic significance which can be attached to a grammar lesson on noun clusters.[10] The sentence is from Malcolm X Speaks. The subject sector is the bulk of the sentence, but the nucleus of the cluster is one of the broadest of generalized inanimate count nouns filling a pattern only with a vague assertion.[11] Malcolm wanted that thing in the middle of things, as it were, to create a split sentence (as I will call it) as the illocutionary act. "The white man" is an

entire predication to itself. Analysis of the sentence and the sentence subject shows how the word choice and the post-modifier create the sense of separation and allow for the development of force -- feeling -- in the statement. The sentence is a rhetorical artifact. Inner city students are fully ready to evaluate such problems mentally and appreciate their significance. And this sentence is part of a remedial grammar lesson on the positions for nucleus and pre and post modifiers in noun clusters.[12]

All our students in the inner city context can learn language and writing functions through the nature of language structure. A knowledge of positions and constructions combined with reader anticipations establishes a groundwork for critical and logical development of thinking -- the ultimate purpose of a college education. We can free ourselves from doctrinaire and mystifying critical pronouncements by introducing students themselves to a set of tools which they can take into their own hands. The special maturity of urban students makes this project particularly appropriate. Also important, systems which students can acquire on their own and use with obvious technical devices such as the yes/no qeustion pattern help us to define Edited American English as a <u>written</u> form differing as much from white discourse in the oral mode as it does from black. This resolves the problem of "supplanting a native speech pattern."[13] One black student asked me once "If there's a <u>Black</u> English, how cum' I gotta learn white English?" The answer "to live in a white world" is not a reasoned explanation to me. The answer in linguistic terms is that everyone learns forms of written English to control the reader's response in terms of his expectations, and the learning process applies equally to all students of all colors and language backgrounds.

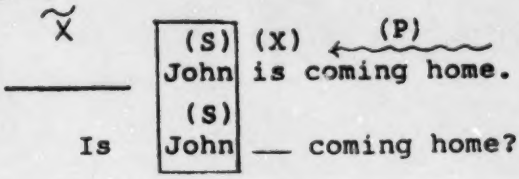
As Milton would have it: "On thy glorious work,/ Now enter, and begin to save mankind." There is no panacea. Linguistically-based language systems offer these benefits: (1) writing teachers can systematize their work and develop clear goals framed in terms

of language structure rather than in terms of superficial objectives such as comma use by itself, which is corrected only negatively, (2) positive language models based on structural models and psychology provide a basis for teaching which is on a par with other college-level disciplines, even though a heavy remedial component may be involved, (3) the psychology of language leads to the psychology of form and advanced critical awareness in upper tier courses, (4) most important to me, the simplified description of goals and methods allows the negative "correction" of grammar errors to be replaced by systematic models and procedures which build confidence. Many of my own students take joy in writing; their fear is gone, replaced by a sense of personal and academic ability. This more open form of teaching and learning, then, is truly the new fusion of aims and goals in language which is now called for.

APPENDIX ONE

X-Word: The word that comes to the front of a sentence to make it into a yes/no question.

Trunk: A group of words that can be made into a yes/no question with no words left over, including only the subject and predicate.



Subject: The words between the X's.

Predicate: The words outside the X's.

Illocutionary act: intent/relation to other structures: F(R P) - Searle

ß:	My friend (cap. +)	is getting the car. (U+) (punc. +)	:	Sn - Allen
U:	ø my friend (F+)	is getting the car. (T+) (EI) ø	:	Ut
T:	my friend (S+)	(x) (P+) is getting the car.	:	Tk
S:	K my friend (*) K		:	Nk
P:		(x) (y) is getting the car	:	Pr
Y:		(getting the car (y) (o))	:	Pd
O:		K the car (*) K	:	nK

I: (Malcolm X describing a third-world breakthrough in 1954): F(R P)

ß: The one thing that was not allowed at the Bandung Conference (S+)

(X) (P+)
was the white man: Su

S: K the one thing that (INCL.) was not allowed at K the Bandung Conference * : nk

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The terminology on this page is taken from works on Sector Analysis by Robert L. Allen, Columbia Teachers College, including English Grammars and English Grammar (New York: 1972) and Working Sentences (New York: 1975), and the concept of illocutionary acts is taken from John Searle, Speech Acts (Cambridge: 1970).

FOOTNOTES

1. David Lockwood, An Introduction to Stratificational Linguistics (New York - Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), p. 12.

2. See appendix one, top frame.

3. Kenneth Pike, "More Revolution: Tagmenics," in Reading About Language, C. Laird & R. H. Gorrell, eds.

4. See appendix one, middle frame.

5. John Searle, Speech Acts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), especially pp. 1-40.

6. Robert L. Allen, English Grammars and English Grammar (New York: Scribner's, 1972), pp. 157-224.

7. For example, Paul B. Diederich, Measuring Growth in English (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1974) essentially suggests multiple readers to overcome a single bias, but this merely spreads the blame more thinly without addressing the students' writing in its own terms.

8. "Psychology and Form" Counter-Statement (Berkely: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 29-44.

9. See appendix one, bottom frame.

10. H. A. Gleason, Linguistics and English Grammar (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), p. 191.

11. The lesson is connected to Robert L. Allen, et. al., Working Sentences (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1975), Units 11-13 on noun clusters.

12. "Students' Right to Their Own Language," College Composition and Communication, 25 (Fall 1974): (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1974, Special Issue).